



April 2011

House Committee Chairmen

Several recent news articles highlight the significant role played by Republican Main Street Partnership Committee Chairmen. With the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives, Congressman Fred Upton (MI) and Dave Camp (MI) now chair the powerful Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means Committees.

The Capitol Hill newspaper Politico recently profiled Chairman Upton, labeling him as “the fixer,” and calling his oversight “far and wide.” In just the first six weeks of the new Congress, Politico stated, “Upton’s hearings and investigations have been relentless and wide ranging. For starters, they have pursued the more than 900 waivers that the Health and Human Services Department has issued under the new health care law, the Environmental Protection Agency’s authority to regulate greenhouse gases, the Federal Communications Commission’s judgment in issuing net neutrality rules on Internet access, and billions of dollars in allegedly wasteful economic-stimulus spending.”

Politico notes that Upton, like other House Republicans, “recognizes the limits in enacting new laws during the next two years. Even if the Democratic-controlled Senate goes along, it’s unlikely that either chamber would have a two-thirds vote to override Obama’s veto.” Upton stated, “I am not too interested in moving a bill if it can’t go all the way. I try to be bipartisan”

In a Congressional Quarterly publication entitled, “2011 Deciders,” Chairmen Upton and Camp’s experience and future activities were profiled.

Congressional Quarterly indicates that Chairman Upton’s Energy and Commerce Committee has the broadest jurisdiction over domestic policy, including health care. Upton has promised intensive oversight of administration programs, and expects to have top administration officials testify at oversight hearings.

Chairman Camp, Congressional Quarterly notes, “is poised to play a pivotal role in an upcoming debate about overhauling the federal tax code – one of the few patches of legislative territory viewed as potentially ripe for compromise in the 112th Congress.” Camp outlined aspects of his agenda, saying, “He hopes that Republican and Democratic tax writers can reach

consensus on lowering tax rates on businesses and on trade policy because they both ultimately lead to job creation and that isn't a partisan issue.”

Maine Senate

Speculation continues that Maine Senator Olympia Snowe will face a Republican primary challenge in 2012. In Maine, which has a conventional primary, Snowe is unlikely to face the same purity test as did others in 2010. The Tea Party Express has announced its disapproval of her votes for stimulus funding and her support of the Supreme Court nominations of Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor. Maine newspapers indicate that two tea party candidates have announced they will oppose Senator Snowe.

While Senator Snowe swept to a third term in 2006 with 74 percent of the vote, the last election saw an unexpected conservative resurgence in her state, with tea party-backed Paul LePage capturing the governor's mansion and Republicans winning both chambers of the state legislature. Governor LePage, however, has said he will back Snowe, even if a more conservative challenger emerges. News reports indicate that his support is in return for Snowe's backing of LePage's gubernatorial bid last year.

Senator Snowe recently released numbers from a strong first quarter fundraising report. She raised nearly \$900,000 so far this year, and has \$2 million cash on hand. A Maine political commentator called this a “very solid number.”

Jennifer Duffy, who analyzes Senate races for the nonpartisan Cook Political Report in Washington, said Snowe's fundraising for the first quarter this year shows that she wants to be well prepared to beat back the type of tea party challenge that surprised several GOP establishment-backed candidates last fall. "What went on last cycle did not go unnoticed by Snowe," Duffy said. "She is working pretty hard to make sure if she does get a serious primary challenge, she is ready for it."

Role of Moderates in the Electorate

In a guest column for the Arizona Daily Sun, journalists Steve and Cokie Roberts point to the long-term power of the moderates in the electorate. They describe President Obama's recent praise of former Governor Jeb Bush's role in education reform. Speculating that President Obama's comments were “part of a deliberate strategy he has been following since the "shellacking" the Democrats absorbed last November,” the columnists go on to point out that the President is “portraying himself as a bridge-builder, a consensus-maker, someone who is willing to find common ground with Republicans like Bush, even if it means catcalls -- and worse -- from his liberal supporters.”

They note that in 2008 “independents” favored Obama by 52 percent to 44 percent, but that “moderates,” a group that includes many independents but also centrist, pragmatic members of both parties, voted more heavily for Obama, 60 percent to 39 percent.

The column documents that at the very moment President Obama is taking dead aim at moderate voters, Congress has fewer moderates than ever. In fact, according to a National Journal study, moderates are easily the least-represented group in American politics. In the Congress that ended last December, the most conservative Democratic senator (Ben Nelson of Nebraska) had a more liberal voting record than the most progressive Republicans (George Voinovich of Ohio and Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe of Maine). Thirty years ago, when the National Journal started keeping these records, 58 senators occupied the middle ground between the polar extremes. Last year, there were none.

If anything, the House has seen an even more dramatic shift toward ideological purity. In 1982, 334 House members posted ratings somewhere between the most liberal Republican and most conservative Democrat. By last year, the number had shriveled to seven, and today all but one of them has left Congress.

The Roberts' indicate that there are many reasons for this pattern, but assert that one of the most important is the rise of vocal advocates and pressure groups -- centered in cable TV, talk radio and the blogosphere -- that demand ideological purity and threaten reprisal against anyone who dares to stray from party orthodoxy.

Centrists in the House of Representatives

Earlier this year, the Washington Post interviewed a number of House Members on the role of centrist Republicans in House activities. Noting that a number of new centrists were elected in 2010, the writers predict that centrists will play an important role in this Congress.

Rep. Charlie Bass (NH), newly elected after four years out of office, hopes centrists will be an aggressive presence in the House. As one of several Republican in the Northeast, he plans to pressure leadership, saying, "In the past the Republican leadership has paid lip service to the Northeast. That is something I'm going to push hard with the leadership."

The key to keeping moderates in office, most claim, will be for leadership to recognize that every district is different and to refrain from forcing lawmakers from tough districts into votes they can't defend back home. Many moderate and conservative Democrats who lost in 2010 believe that their own leaders made exactly that mistake.

Rep. Steve LaTourette (OH) admits that moderates are "clearly the minority of the majority," but that "there is a recognition that without the centrist lawmakers, Republicans would not have a majority." Even Rep. Tom Price (GA), a leading conservative, says, "Every single member helps us make up the majority."